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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

4 June 1957

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 29-57

SUBJECT: Discussion of the Estimative Process and End Product
at Princeton Consultants' Conference, 22-23 May, 1957.
(Note: The remainder of the discussion at the May
Consultants' Conference is reported in a separate
Memorandum.)

1. Participants:

Consultants

25X1A5a1



CIA Representatives

Allen W. Dulles



25X1A9a

2. The afternoon session on 23 May was chaired by the Director who asked the Consultants to address themselves to a consideration of the estimative process and the improvement of its end product. He introduced the discussion by quoting from a memorandum by [redacted] recommending that NIEs be written so as to give greater emphasis to the statement of possible alternative developments and rely less upon flat and undocumented predictions.

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3. The discussion that followed centered around four principal topics: (a) replacement of conclusions in the form now customary with a three or four page narrative summary, (b) changes in the form and content of the NIE Discussion, (c) the handling of differences of opinion among the contributing agencies, and (d) the question of policy recommendations in intelligence estimates.

4. The consensus among the Consultants on these topics was: (a) that consideration should be given to the publication of a separate summary, not coordinated among the IAC agencies, of each National Intelligence Estimate, (b) that attention be given to the inclusion of more data in, or attached to, the text of National Intelligence Estimates and more consideration of alternative possibilities, (c) that every effort be made to inform the NIE reader of the existence of differences of opinion within the Intelligence Community, and (d) that more attention should be given to US courses of action as a factor in all estimative problems.

5. Topic A. Narrative Summary

25X1X7 The DIRECTOR commented favorably on the terseness and conciseness of [REDACTED] appreciations. He suggested replacing the present form of NIE Conclusions with a three or four page narrative

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summary in place of the present conclusions composed of sentences
excised from the NIE text. 25X1A5a1 suggested that it would be desirable, when time permitted, to consider the conclusions the day following acceptance of the text; this would make it possible to have the conclusions a more effective and integrated document than can be produced at the end of a long and tiring discussion of the text. 25X1A5a1

25X1A5a1 said that, while recently reading over the entire O/NE product of the past year, he had felt the need for a crisp and stimulating summary attached to each NIE. He suggested that an uncoordinated summary be issued by the DCI, that it be written with conclusions implicit, and that it be bound separately and apart from the NIE text. 25X1A5a1

25X1A5a1 suggested that such a summary might be written by one man and not put through the coordination process. 25X1A5a1 reminded the consultants that the present practice with respect to conclusions has been followed because other types of conclusions are difficult to coordinate with the IAC agencies. At the same time he reminded the consultants that a recent poll of readers of NIEs showed that the majority felt that the most important feature of the NIE was that it represents the agreed position of the Intelligence Community.

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6. Topic B. Suggestions for changes in present form of the text of NIEs.

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██████████ proposed that consideration be given to the issuance of two related papers on each National Estimate, the first to be a concise summary as discussed above and the second to be a more detailed study of the problem, similar to the text of present NIEs, but possibly with more documentation. ██████████ said he felt that frequently NIEs did not have enough data to make the estimates that they contained understandable and useful. He suggested that it be made a practice to indicate within the text something of the quality and quantity of data available on the problems dealt with. ██████████ expressed his approval of the practice of attaching appendices to the text in order to make factual data available without unduly lengthening NIEs.

25X1A5a1

The Consultants expressed approval of ██████████ recommendation of the practice of stating alternative possibilities before making the final estimate of probable developments.

7. Topic C. Handling of differences of opinion.

25X1A5a1

██████████ gave strong expression to the belief that it is dangerous to allow differences of opinion within the Intelligence

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Community to be submerged in the standard "compromise consensus" and proposed that where differences exist, their existence should be made clear. [REDACTED] suggested weaving dissenting opinions into the text of NIEs rather than submerging them in footnotes. The DIRECTOR expressed the opinion that a footnote was most often the best way to record dissents from the DCI position. [REDACTED] suggested that less space be devoted to items on which agreement prevailed and more attention be given to areas of disagreement. The DIRECTOR pointed out that although there are many problems on which intelligent and informed men disagree, there have actually been very few basic differences among the [REDACTED] agencies on the interpretation of political and economic data. [REDACTED] pointed out that contributions to the last Soviet paper revealed differences on Soviet military capabilities, which were quite clearly stated in the NIE, but that there were no important differences on the Soviet political and economic situation. [REDACTED] suggested that members of the Board of National Estimates could frequently speak out more clearly and emphatically if they knew the Director's precise position on specific issues. The DIRECTOR indicated his willingness to be consulted on his position whenever desirable.

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8. Topic D. Treatment of US Policy in National Intelligence
Estimates

The DIRECTOR observed that the Intelligence "Watchdog Committee" has recommended that he play a more active and aggressive role in the Intelligence Community. He recommended that more attention be given to the role of US policy in NIEs and expressed the opinion that this can be done without violating the rules defining and limiting Intelligence activity. 25X1A5a1 [REDACTED] pointed out that O/NE and the Consultants had always been very conscious of the standing rule against estimating probable US courses of action and expressed the opinion that there would be great interest in the Director's recommendation.

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